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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND VFM YABUNAKA DISCUSS BILATERAL  
RELATIONSHIP, REGIONAL ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer per 1.4 (b/d)

#### Summary

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¶1. (C) Recent incidents involving U.S. servicemen have highlighted the need for the United States and Japan to make efforts to strengthen grassroots public support for and understanding of our alliance's strategic importance, the Ambassador told VFM Yabunaka on April 8. While VFM Yabunaka agreed that such public diplomacy would be useful, he noted that public support is already very strong (above 70%); domestic politicking aside, even the opposition would not attempt to alter the alliance; and, for his part, VFM Yabunaka constantly stresses to the press and others that American servicemen are far from home and are in Japan to defend it. VFM Yabunaka also briefed the Ambassador on the recent Japan-Russia Strategic Dialogue, in which it was clear Russia has made a decision to pay more attention to Asia; noted that planning continues for Hu Jintao's early May visit, adding that an East China Sea deal may still be possible; offered his positive assessment of the PRC-proposed U.S.-Japan-PRC meeting framework; and, expressed his regret that the Host Nation Support legislation was delayed for political reasons, noting that it will be passed by May 3 at the latest. End Summary.

#### VFM Yabunaka Travel to Washington

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¶2. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka opened his April 8 meeting with the Ambassador by noting his plans to travel the next day to Washington to meet with the Deputy Secretary. He expressed his hope that, as this will be his first visit to Washington as VFM, the Ambassador could provide some advice on the current mood in Washington towards Japan. The VFM also plans a number of other meetings, including with the foreign policy advisors to the presidential candidates. The VFM's hope for these is to brief these individuals on Japan's viewpoints and policy orientations in the Asia region.

#### Japan-Russia Strategic Dialogue

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¶3. (C) VFM Yabunaka noted that on April 7 he met with Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Denisov for the fourth Japan-Russia Strategic Dialogue. The two had a frank

exchange of views, and Yabunaka noted that, although Denisov had been presumed to be in line to replace FM Lavrov, it appears that Lavrov will remain in his position, and thus so may Denisov. Responding to the Ambassador's question about Vladimir Putin's rumored attendance at the G8 summit, Yabunaka said that Medvedev would attend, and that Foreign Minister Koumura would travel to Moscow April 14 and would deliver the G8 invitation to Medvedev. Yabunaka acknowledged that the source of the Putin G8 rumor was former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, who met with Putin in December. However, Putin has made clear that Russia's foreign policy is in Medvedev's hands.

14. (C) It seems clear that Russia is restoking its economic and strategic interest in East Asia, Yabunaka continued. One sign of this is the Russian Government's increased financial support for residents of the disputed Northern Territories. Another is the increased pace of high-level Russian visits to Japan; "it seems they want to do something with us," Yabunaka said. Japan has put forward its eight-point Eastern Siberia/Far East Initiative, which seeks to advance bilateral cooperation in the fields of energy, transportation, distribution, environmental protection and tourism. The Russians are particularly interested in technology exchanges and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Each area is seeing follow-through, and a fiber optic cable was recently connected between Japan and Europe (through Russia) that will speed up data transfer times.

15. (C) The two sides also discussed regional issues such as China, and VFM Yabunaka explained to his Russian counterpart that all of Japan's relations in Asia, including with China, are grounded in the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship. Japan wishes to improve its relations with China, Russia and India and the rise of China has necessitated that Japan "talk about this with the other players in the region." Denisov expressed an interest in regional architecture, such as the Shanghai Cooperative Organization, APEC (which Russia will host in Vladivostok in 2012) and even the East Asia Summit, which Russia may seek to join someday.

#### Complicated Japanese Political Situation

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16. (C) VFM Yabunaka noted that PM Fukuda may try to visit Russia at the end of April, taking advantage of a Japanese holiday on April 29 to travel April 26-29. Complicating this planning is a by-election in Yamaguchi prefecture on April 27 that will be a bellwether of where public sentiment lies on renewing Japan's gasoline tax, which the ruling coalition-controlled Lower House could choose to re-vote on as early as April 29. The political scene in Japan has been in disarray, the most recent example being the contretemps surrounding the selection of the next Bank of Japan Governor.

The Ambassador noted that the failure of the ruling coalition and opposition party to agree on a suitable candidate sent a terrible message at a sensitive time for the global economy and financial system.

#### Host Nation Support

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17. (C) VFM Yabunaka expressed his regret that this kind of domestic political wrangling had delayed the passage of the legislation for Host Nation Support. At the latest, this legislation will go into force on May 3, perhaps earlier if the opposition decides to vote it down in the Upper House, opening the way for the Lower House's previous passage to take precedence. In response to VFM Yabunaka's question, the Ambassador noted that, while he did not think that the delay would have any practical implications on USFJ operations, it is nonetheless disappointing that the U.S.-Japan alliance has been allowed to become a political football. VFM Yabunaka agreed, noting that the mass media is largely to blame for stirring up controversies where they do not exist, such as Japanese Government payments for bars and golf course attendants on U.S. facilities. Many within the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) are also unhappy that things

have come to this, and VFM Yabunaka expressed his hope that Washington understands the Japanese Government's desire that this delay not cause any practical problems.

18. (C) The Japanese public is firmly behind the bilateral alliance, and the political games currently taking place are no more than opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa's attempt to use any means at his disposal to gain the upper hand, VFM Yabunaka continued. There is "no way" that Ozawa is opposed to the security alliance, Yabunaka stressed.

#### Incidents

19. (C) VFM Yabunaka expressed his appreciation for the Ambassador's and USFJ's quick reaction to the recent incidents on Okinawa and in Yokosuka. In particular, the meeting with Yokosuka Mayor Kabaya went a long way. The Ambassador agreed, noting that Kabaya has always tried to be helpful, and it was important to give him support after the recent taxi driver murder. Unfortunately, some in the press have taken the line that somehow the SOFA did not work, the Ambassador noted. That is not true. In every aspect of this case, from when NCIS received word from the sailor about his whereabouts to during his questioning, the Japanese authorities were involved. There was nothing stopping them from asking for anything at any step in the process. It is regrettable that there is a public perception that we were in the way or the SOFA did not work. Yabunaka agreed that the leaks and misreporting were annoying, and for its part MOFA tried to correct the record. The opposition has asked for a revision of the SOFA, and MOFA's position is that, if there is a problem, show us. But there are no problems; the system works, Yabunaka emphasized.

#### Building Public Support for Alliance

10. (C) On the issue of deserters, Yabunaka noted the utility of greater information sharing, and the Ambassador agreed there will always be areas in which we can make improvements.

As the Kanagawa Governor recently suggested, perhaps there is a need to examine setting up a public committee or forum to ensure that the responsibility of managing our important relationship is not limited to our two governments, but instead extends into local communities, the Ambassador said. We need to find a way to get buy-in from all concerned on the importance of the alliance. Yabunaka agreed on the need to build public understanding about the importance of the alliance for Japan's security and regional stability, but was unsure about the format of a public forum or committee. Responding to the Ambassador's expression of concern that incidents lead to a public outcry about the American occupation army, VFM Yabunaka was optimistic that there is solid support, with more than 70% of the Japanese people welcoming the alliance and U.S. forces.

11. (C) The Ambassador agreed that we have made progress in building understanding among the Japanese public about the strategic importance of the alliance, particularly with the rise of China and the ongoing North Korean threat. Nevertheless, we should try harder to connect with the Japanese public. There is an unfortunate perception that American soldiers and sailors are animals that should be kept in cages, which is an attitude one would not find in the UK or Australia. While we understand there is nothing the Japanese Government can do, we need to strengthen public understanding of why we are here. Yabunaka replied that for the past several weeks he has met every morning with reporters at his home to explain the importance of the alliance; "these young people are far from home to defend us," Yabunaka said he stresses. While there may be some bad apples among the troops, for the most part they are good members of the community. Yabunaka reiterated that the Japanese do not use these problems to think about the need to reexamine the broader bilateral relationship.

12. (C) Responding to North American Affairs Bureau DG

Nishimiya's comment on the possible benefit of educating the sailors on the George Washington before its arrival in Yokosuka, the Ambassador said that this kind of point of view is part of the problem. It is no more okay for U.S. servicemen and women to commit crimes in America or Europe than it is in Japan; just because they are in Japan does not increase the chance they will commit rape or murder unless they are instructed not to. While we cannot promise that crimes will not happen, we nonetheless need to get away from the idea that U.S. servicemen are bad. VFM Yabunaka suggested that as the 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Japan security alliance approaches (2010), there will be many good opportunities to get the word out on the importance of the alliance and Japan's gratitude for it.

#### Advice for Washington Trip

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¶13. (C) VFM Yabunaka sought the Ambassador's advice for his upcoming discussions in Washington. The Ambassador observed that there is genuine interest in Washington about what is happening in Japan. People are not sure what the political situation is and how long the current government will last. With the domestic political situation negatively impacting Japan's contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom, the BOJ Governor selection and Host Nation Support, there are signs that something is wrong, and VFM Yabunaka should try to explain what is right. That is, the alliance is not in danger, but we are going through a time in which people are trying to work through the political situation. People will also be interested in hearing about China and Tibet and about Japan's goals for the G8 summit. Also, it would be useful to hear from VFM Yabunaka about DPRI, as there is increasing concern that it will go the way of SACO if it does not regain its momentum. The Deputy Secretary may also wish to hear about BISTF and intelligence reform. Under former Prime Minister Koizumi, it seemed that everyone was on the same page in Japan, but now things appear to be different, which is by no means a criticism of PM Fukuda, who made a good impression on the President. People in Washington will want to know what is happening, and what are the short- and long-term problems, the Ambassador said.

¶14. (C) Returning to the issue of managing local relations in areas with U.S. facilities, the Ambassador noted that under Okinawa Governor Nakaima's leadership, "things are better." Previous Governor Inamine was difficult and never wanted to talk or move beyond confrontation. It always seemed like the two sides were playing roles, and it is better on Okinawa and elsewhere when both sides can talk candidly and publicly acknowledge that it is in both side's interest to improve relations.

#### China, Multilateral Meetings

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¶15. (C) Responding to VFM Yabunaka's question about the mood in Washington towards China, the Ambassador noted that Senator Clinton had that morning called on President Bush to boycott the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics. While there is no Japan bashing these days, it seems that within our political process, China bashing is generated because of people's concerns about the economy and lost jobs. The Bush Administration has sought to engage with China, and we have made clear to them that our relationship with Japan is not up for discussion. China accepts this, and the U.S.-China relationship is better than ever, the Ambassador said.

¶16. (C) VFM Yabunaka noted that the Dalai Lama plans to transit Tokyo on April 14 on his way to the United States, where he has events scheduled in Seattle and Michigan. It is unclear whether he will go to Washington, and the opposition DPJ has criticized the government for not traveling to Narita to meet with the Dalai Lama. MOFA is continuing its plans for the May visit of Hu Jintao (likely to start on May 6), and Hu himself appears determined to have good relations with Japan. The two sides will produce a joint paper that will be "short and strong" and will not refer to the past, but

instead will focus on the future. However, the Tibet and poisoned gyoza issues are ""unfortunate,"" Yabunaka said.

¶17. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about progress on joint natural resources development in the East China Sea, Yabunaka said he is considering travel to Beijing on April 14 to try to advance the issue. It may still be possible to resolve before Hu's visit, Yabunaka said. The Ambassador noted that the United States welcomes increased Japan-PRC engagement, and that working together, the United States and Japan can help to moderate China's behavior. Yabunaka said that planning is underway for a possible Japan-ROK-China summit later in the year, and that China has proposed a U.S.-Japan-China meeting framework. VFM Yabunaka noted that he personally feels positively about this, but agreed with the Ambassador that the ROK has been the sticking point. While understandable that South Korea would not want to be left out of multilateral meetings discussing Korean Peninsula issues, there are enough global and other issues to discuss among the United States, Japan and China -- such as the environment -- to make such a meeting worthwhile, VFM Yabunaka suggested.

SCHIEFFER